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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BO](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN MFA ON BELARUS, UKRAINE ELECTIONS

REF: A. STATE 51992

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 3510

Classified By: DCM Daniel A. Russell. Reasons: 1.4(B/D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Charge d'Affaires delivered demarche on Belarus elections (ref A) April 7 to Vyacheslav Kovalenko, who was acting for Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin on CIS affairs. Charge urged Russia to use its influence to help secure release of peaceful protesters who had been detained by the Lukashenko regime and to join the U.S. and EU in supporting the development of democracy in Belarus. Kovalenko responded that the U.S. should show flexibility and begin talking to Lukashenko; that would be the quickest path to democracy in Belarus. Kovalenko reiterated that, despite some irregularities, Lukashenko's reelection was legitimate. He expressed some concern about the post-election crackdown, but gave Minsk the benefit of the doubt in upholding its laws. Kovalenko made a point of commenting on opposition leader Milinkevich's anti-Russian views, most notably his stated opposition to the Union State Treaty. On Ukraine, Kovalenko said that Russia supported the creation of a stable coalition government, but recognized that that would take time. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On April 7, Charge d'Affaires met to discuss Belarus with MFA Second CIS Department Director Vyacheslav Kovalenko, who was responsible for CIS affairs while Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin was acting Foreign Minister. Drawing upon reftel points, Charge underscored that the March 19 presidential election in Belarus was fundamentally flawed and not in accordance with OSCE principles and standards. He expressed serious concern about the detention of several hundred peaceful demonstrators including opposition leader Kazulin and the former Polish Ambassador. Charge urged Russia to use its considerable influence with the Lukashenko regime to help secure their release. Noting that Russia, the EU and the U.S. should share the objective of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Belarus, he urged that Russia join in supporting the development of democracy in that country.

[1](#)3. (C) Kovalenko agreed that there were points of convergence in U.S. and Russian views on Belarus. He welcomed the opportunity for continued dialogue with the U.S. and EU on Belarus, and acknowledged the latter's "democracy deficit". Kovalenko, however, argued that, although democratization was an inevitable process, if accelerated too quickly, it could lead to unpredictable results. He cited Russia in the early 1990s and contemporary Ukraine and Georgia as examples.

[1](#)4. (C) Kovalenko acknowledged that there had been electoral violations in Belarus, but flatly stated that Lukashenko's election was not illegitimate as the West claimed. Scattered irregularities did not make the election illegitimate. Kovalenko compared the Belarusian election favorably to the recent election in Ukraine, which he claimed had featured

electoral violations, most notably in Crimea.

15. (C) On the Lukashenko regime's crackdown on the opposition, Kovalenko stated that the situation "worries the Russian government." But he pointed out that Belarus had laws -- for example, requiring permits for mass demonstrations -- and the opposition had broken those laws. Kovalenko commented on the anti-Russian sentiments of some in the Belarusian opposition, singling out Milinkevich for special mention. He claimed that Milinkevich harbors a fundamentally anti-Russian worldview and had only softened his position to win favor as the unified opposition candidate. That said, Kovalenko did note that Milinkevich had been received in Moscow and given the opportunity to exchange views.

16. (C) On the way forward, Kovalenko agreed that the U.S., EU, and Russia all want to see a more democratic Belarus, but Western tactics needed to be "smarter and more flexible." For at least ten years, the U.S. has been pushing to democratize Belarus and yet the result has not been achieved. Kovalenko suggested the U.S. should try talking to Lukashenko. "Patient dialogue" would help Belarus democratize most quickly, he insisted. CDA reiterated our hope that Russia would work to secure the release of those detained in Minsk and to support development of a more democratic Belarus.

Ukraine

17. (C) Charge and Kovalenko briefly exchanged views on post-election developments in Ukraine. Kovalenko was downbeat about the current situation. The Russian MFA's neutral statement in the immediate aftermath of the

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parliamentary election (ref B), he said, was indicative of Russia's willingness not to politicize the electoral irregularities there. Kovalenko stated that Russia strongly supported Ukraine's territorial integrity and hoped that a stable coalition government would soon be formed. Putin had told Yushchenko in their most recent phone conversation that he could count on Russia's support. Referring to Tymoshenko's campaign pledge to reopen the January 4 gas deal, Kovalenko said that Russia could not remain indifferent to such a scenario. He gloomily predicted a lengthy process of government formation in Kiev and worried about the effect on bilateral trade and overall relations.

18. (C) Charge coordinated the delivery of the demarche on Belarus with the Austrian Ambassador and other members of the EU. The Austrian Ambassador plans to deliver the parallel EU demarche with other EU Troika representatives early next week.

BURNS